

## **Celebrate Spirit of Freedom on Flag Day**

By Supervisor Gary Ovitt

Nothing symbolizes our country's values and traditions more than the Flag of the United States of America. The image of Betsy Ross sewing the first flag at the request of George Washington or the marines raising the flag on the summit of Mount Suribachi on Iwo Jima during World War II, have left an indelible image of duty and honor. The red, white and blue is known around the world as a beacon of freedom and liberty.

Flag Day was first observed in 1877 on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Continental Congress adopting the Stars and Stripes as the official flag of the United States. That same year saw Congress ask that all public buildings fly the flag on June 14. In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed Flag Day as a national celebration. However, the holiday was not officially recognized until 1949 when President Harry Truman signed the National Flag Day Bill, officially designating June 14 as National Flag Day.

June 14 marks the celebration of Flag Day, an occasion not only to display and respect "Old Glory," but also to celebrate the ideals of freedom, pluralism, and democracy.

While Americans celebrate Independence Day on July 4<sup>th</sup>, Flag Day was first celebrated when a Wisconsin schoolteacher teaching his students about the importance of our flag as a symbol of national unity thought there should be an annual celebration of our flag. He picked the June 14 anniversary of the adoption of the "Stars and Stripes" as the flag of the United States, as the celebration date.

In his 2003 proclamation commemorating National Flag Day, President Bush wrote that "the American flag continues to invoke pride and resolve among our people, especially when we see it next to a headstone, on the masts of our military ships, worn by the generations of Americans who have proudly served our country, or emerging from the wreckage caused by a natural or manmade disaster."

Celebrating Flag Day takes on additional importance this year as we are at war. The hearts of all Americans are heavy when we read of the tragic deaths of our brave American men and women in the Armed Forces, who have given the ultimate sacrifice in defending freedom and democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan. Flying our flag every day is one simple sign of respect we can take to show our support for our brave defenders of freedom.

Another important way to celebrate is to participate in the annual "Pause for the Pledge of Allegiance." Sponsored by the National Flag Day Foundation, all Americans are encouraged to recite the Pledge of Allegiance at 4:00 p.m. Pacific Time on Flag Day. Reciting the Pledge of Allegiance with one voice is a powerful demonstration of national unity, a living embodiment of the freedom that binds us together.

Now, more than ever, Californians must be united to support our troops in their dangerous mission abroad and their important role here at home. The "Stars and Stripes" inspires us to always pursue the American ideals of freedom and democracy at home and around the world.

As Ruth Apperson Rous writes in her celebrated poem, "I Am the Flag"; "I represent these eternal principles: liberty, justice, and humanity."